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POSSIBLE REFORMATION OF THE DRINK TRAFFIC.

BY THE REV. W. S. RAINSFORD, D. D.

I have been invited to reply in the June number of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* to criticisms on this article and questions arising therefrom. In undertaking to do so I wish it understood that I cannot, of course, promise to even attempt an answer to all questions that may be raised. I have no wish to pose as possessing an encyclopædic knowledge on a subject of such vast proportions and extraordinary difficulty as the drink problem. No sudden cure is possible. No radical reformation can be wrought quickly. The diseased appetites of the multitude are too deeply seated for that. In our day it is only the quack who dares to stand forth with a bunch of "all-heal" in his hand, and when he does stand forth it is only fools who listen to him long. All communication should be addressed to the Rev. W. S. Rainsford, D. D., care of *NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, 3 East Fourteenth street, New York.

ANYONE suggesting the possibility of reforming and purifying the drink traffic, more specially in our large cities, places himself in a position of peculiar difficulty. At first, of necessity, his enemies are mighty and many; his supporters doubtful and few. Ranged against him are the enormous organized forces of alcohol producers and retailers. Next, come the professional politicians whose interests are bound up in many ways with the present system of saloons and corner groggeries. These places are the prolific spawning-beds for dickers and deals. Here such things are born. If they are not the offspring of the saloon, that institution serves as an excellent midwife and wet-nurse to them. It is needless to say that the ordinary temperance reformer and temperance politician cannot be induced to look favorably on any scheme of reform. He is for destroying the trade, root and branch. Here, then, are three groups of opponents, each strong in numbers and resources, each prepared to denounce and oppose with cleverness and bitterness any movement that aims at the reformation of the drink trade itself.

Yet it seems to me that it is just along this line alone that

a lasting and permanent temperance reform may be worked out. The practical reformer must sit down and count the cost ; whether he will be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand ; and by wise disposal of the numbers at his command make up for his inferiority of force. Here temperance agitation and agitators persistently fail. They attempt the impossible. They seek to root out alcohol, both the love of it and the use of it. They might as well seek to root out the use of beef or fish. It seems to me past argument, that in some form or another alcohol is here to stay. I do not know of any temperance movement that even attempts to meet the inevitableness of the use of alcohol squarely. The prohibitionist refuses to draw any distinction between the moderate and the immoderate drinker. All uses of his enemy are, in his view, criminal. The seller, the consumer, are in all cases public enemies to be suppressed by law. Thus the prohibitionist ignores the past of our race, and history with him counts for nothing. His position is one of fanatical hatred. Of all the obstacles that bar the way to a true reform he himself constitutes the worst.*

The coffee-house reformer provides the public with a good thing. For that portion of the community who wish to use coffee his plans are admirable. But neither coffee nor kindred beverages can take the place with the multitudes that alcohol in some form has taken for ages, and, for a long time, will continue to take.

To my mind the advocate of high license, if he gain his way, leaves the sting in the evil business still. His system permits the trade in drink to be pushed and expanded by individual capacity and for individual gain. And as, under his proposed system, licenses would be greatly reduced in number, it simply follows that those holding them would need to exercise a more thorough business capacity, would need to more thoroughly advertise and push their trade, in order to reimburse themselves for the added cost of their license. Nor can the religious reformer hope to achieve much, as long as he confines himself to the present methods in vogue in churches and missions. These deal with the *made* drunkard, while they too often ignore the causes that make him. The *made* drunkard can be saved, but very seldom is saved ; nor

* Here I must say that I do not wish to be understood as asserting that, under certain conditions and in smaller communities, local prohibition may not do much good.

are we using, it seems to me, in approaching him as we do, chiefly on the emotional side of his nature, the most likely means to deal with his almost hopeless case.

If the foregoing is at all a fair description of the present aims and methods of temperance reform, it seems nothing less than wrong for the church to content herself any longer with such methods. It is inexcusable for Christian people to fancy that in the employment of them they have discharged their responsibility, while in the growing light of knowledge the sources and roots of the evils of intemperance, as well as the far-reaching blight engendered by them, are so much more evidently laid bare to the gaze of the student.

No present temperance move then has, it seems to me, a chance of success. A limited success, of course, they all attain, for any effort to aid our fellow man, that is honestly made, cannot altogether fail of good result. But surely the time is ripe for the entrance on this field of a class of helpers, a class of efforts, so far at least unrecognized and unorganized. I refer to that vast number of moderate-minded men, temperate people in the fullest sense, who deplore drunkenness, but who know full well that, for generations to come, we cannot hope to eliminate the drunkard. These people cannot heartily support any of the present temperance movements, for they themselves are not prepared to banish alcohol in all shapes from their lives, and they therefore feel the inconsistency of demanding that their neighbors should do so. Once move this class, once prove to them, not that the present system, under which the retail drink trade is carried on, is bad, nay, almost the worst possible—for that they know—but that they and they only have power to change and modify it, that they can modify it; and I cannot but believe that something in the way of lasting reform is at least in view.

How is this vast body of temperate opinion to be educated and fused with zeal for the public good? How is it to be educated as to what should be done and what can be done to save the multitudes from the ruin of drink? I know of no other method but that which has been employed so often and so successfully in bringing about various necessary reforms—the method of concrete example. Here and there groups of moderate people must take hold of the evil thing and try to rob it of its worst features.

No field for such effort can possibly be as unpromising as

that presented by the city of New York, where the drink power is confessedly at its worst. What can be done in New York? One thing is self-evident at the outset. The crowded nature of the city makes places of recreation and social meeting necessary. Clubs, amusement halls, restaurants, play and must continue to play a disproportionately important part in our municipal life. The working people pent up in terribly narrow quarters need such outlets more than do their richer neighbors. To these, even such a place of resort as the present saloon, with all its evils, is, taking it all in all, a boon. To close all of our ten thousand saloons, were such an act possible, without providing some other and better institutions to take their place, would be a calamity to New York and a crime against her.

But why not, it is objected, supply their places with coffee palaces, teetotums, etc.? No doubt good would follow the indefinite multiplication of such resorts. But what are we to do with the mass of the populace that demand alcohol in some shape or other? All temperance schemes simply ignore this very large majority of the working people. The day of paternalism is well nigh over. Education, and a thousand facilities for man's intercourse with man, has opened up to one class the life of the other. The liberty allowed with unquestioning accord to the rich and well-to-do cannot be denied to the wage-earners. Whoever dreamed, I ask, of a first-class social club, within whose walls alcohol could not be obtained? Such a club could not exist in this city. To meet the social needs of any class we must look frankly at what those needs are, and not content ourselves with looking at what we wished they were. Nay, we must approach the question, remembering that what men believed their needs to be, these to all intents and purposes are their needs. You may set to work to change slowly that opinion as to need, and so, working from within, you eliminate the evil by educating and raising the standard of need; but this is the only way to revolutionize the social usage of any class of men. To bring about a change in any other way is hopeless.

You may convince the rich man that he does not need alcohol in his club, and then you can banish it from the club. Till you do so convince him you are only fooling yourself and wasting time in seeking to banish it by restriction. You may convince the working people that they are better without alcohol, and so

induce them to forego its use ; but till you have wrought this change, any scheme of social recreation, any plan for providing places of public entertainment, that shall be in the best sense popular, that shall be acceptable to the masses, is, I say, a chimera, a waste of energy, and an exercise of an unwise and hurtful paternalism. However well-meant, it cannot reach those most in need of aid.

I criticise present temperance methods, then, not because they have not achieved good, but because they have not and cannot cover the whole field of reform. They have done something in educating the public mind ; but we have arrived at a stage in our development where the intemperate advocacy of intemperate temperance is fatal to the best result. Much further I think we cannot go, if we do not win the hearty coöperation of the unused and unorganized forces of moderation. We are very far indeed from being in a position to speak authoritatively on all sides of the drink problem. Rum has been made responsible for more than its admittedly large share of human wretchedness. The necessary data are hard to procure, and the temptation to deal with them in not the most honest fashion is very strong. Account for it as you will, the moderate opinion of the country is profoundly distrustful of statements made by the advocates of temperance ; and yet it is, I think, becoming more and more convinced of the need of scientific knowledge, and more willing to lend a hand in a great work, when the path of duty shall be made plain.

The present saloon embodies, as all know, the worst features of the trade. It is contrived to push the sale of drink and little else but drink. I may be here accused of exaggeration. Some will remind me of the variety, sometimes great, of foods provided at the saloon counter. And I admit that this is measurably true of the better class of saloons ; for the large profit of the present saloon-keeper, when his business is well established, enables him to provide a tempting lunch at or below cost, as well as to pay for his license and to meet other illegitimate charges in the shape of assessments. This being so, it only proves how important to the head of the establishment, under the present system, is the sale of that drink on which alone profit is reaped. His lunches and everything about his place are cunningly contrived by the saloon-keeper as lures to drink. If, as is sometimes unquestionably the case, the

saloon-keeper uses his influence when he can to check drunkenness, he is certainly the most remarkable instance in modern life of the capacity of strong character to triumph over environment, to rise superior to the instincts of professionalism. To reform the trade, we must seek to alter the very nature of the present drink resort. Its life and mainspring are now private profit. No trade makes so large a return, perhaps, to private enterprise. It is able to pay the brewer and distiller, the saloon-keeper himself, and the politician. Take the profit out of it and you cut its sinews of war. Leave profit in it and, I repeat, that you do not take the sting out of the evil even by reducing the number of saloons; for sharper practice, worse liquor, and more astute business methods will all be used to push the sales.

Mr. Gladstone, speaking in 1890, laid his finger on the root-evil of the present system in the following passage :

“ At present, as I understand it, the case of the Government is that the number of public-houses is enormous. Yes, sir; but something else ought to be taken into consideration. Why is it that the position of the public-houses in this country of ours is lower than it is in any other country in Europe? This is the result of the management we have followed, and the number does not in the slightest degree tend to mitigate that statement. I am one of those who see the utmost, incurable, radical and profound mischief from what is called the publicans' monopoly, and not through any fault of the publican, or, indeed, of any one. My firm belief is that as long as the monopoly connected with private interests belongs to the trade, you will never have true and efficient police supervision exercised over the public-houses, and without that they must continue to hold the disparaged and unsatisfactory position which they do hold now and have held for many generations.”

The saloon of the future will not only not be run for private profit; it will be shaped to meet the actual needs of the public. It will be a veritable “ public-house.” Drink is but one factor, we hope a decreasing factor, in the life of the people. Drink, indeed, often gains its hold because the life of its victims is so dull and flat, so utterly devoid of all legitimate amusement and recreation, that they know no other excitement, no other relaxation, than the semi-stupor, the grateful forgetfulness of creeping inebriation. Amusement, variety, aroused interest—these are the true and deadliest foes to the drink habit. If we could only get at the lives of our working people, increasing their variety, and giving them new interests, we would be doing much to loosen the hold intemperance has obtained on the wage-earners. It is evil environ-

ment that makes drink, fully as much as drink makes environment evil.

The public-house then that the people need, is no mere dram shop ; but a commodious meeting-place, a club house. It must provide amusement—music certainly. It needs no standing bar. Its food supply must be plentiful, cheap, varied and well cooked. Milk, coffee, and tea, must be as much its staple trade as beer, wines, and in some cases, perhaps, spirits. It should be a directly business concern, with no savor of crankdom or religion about it. It must embody one aim and one only—the providing of reasonable and healthy amusement and opportunities for social intercourse for the masses of the people, obliged by the vicious circumstances surrounding their homes to secure some space and entertainment away from them. Any sign of philanthropy about it, or any running of it as a reforming agency, foredooms it to failure.

It will be objected that the introduction of any such reforms as these in the drink trade require legislation. In time, when the public are educated more thoroughly on this subject, legislation and legislation of a very thorough sort will be demanded. The intemperate nature of the legislation that has so far been pushed has postponed the day of wise and truly temperate enactments ; but that day must come. Sooner or later it will become evident that it is in the highest degree unwise and inexpedient to leave the sale of alcohol in private hands ; to permit its manufacture and distribution to be a matter of private enterprise. Some such regulative system as that adopted in Sweden and Norway, where within fifteen years the total sales of spirits has been reduced by one-half, or some improvement on that system, will be adopted here. But pending such a time we can, by concrete example, do much to educate the public as to the most likely methods by which this better state of things may be brought about.

Let me remind all who are disposed to condemn as impossible and hopeless any such attempt to widen the field of Christian responsibility, so that it would include this drink question, that a limited class of persons has most effectually rendered this very service to the community, and is rendering it even now. There are a comparatively small body of people who are always ready to devote themselves to a difficult and unpopular task, and who know that final success must, of necessity, be preceded by many failures. These people are almost invariably members of Chris-

tian churches ; and so it naturally comes to pass that the impetus for such a movement as I suggest must be sought within the churches themselves. Of course I do not advocate, nor have I advocated, the churches as corporations going into the liquor business. This would be both absurd and impossible. As corporations, the churches cannot take hold of any of the social problems that we deal with—the problems of education, of lodging the poor, of organized charity. And yet in each of these fields of necessary reform the churches have led the way in the instruction of the public by methods of concrete example. As an instance it may be noted that very soon it will be impossible to find a large number of little children over three years old wandering our sidewalks and crawling on the door steps, while they drink in the moral and physical diseases of the slums. Why ? Because years ago a few—a very few at first—saw the evils consequent on wasted childhood, and there and then planted kindergartens. They were few and far between, dependent on voluntary support, and of course utterly inadequate to the needs of the districts in which they were situated. Yet see what they have done. These few volunteer kindergartens have demonstrated by a concrete example the needs of our children, and our public-school system must soon be made to include a complete system of kindergartens.

Not only in the vital matter of education for the children do we owe much to private enterprise ; in almost all departments of our social life it prepares the way of reform, temporarily and very partially occupying the ground, grappling with problems that later on must be taken up by the State.

It seems then altogether timely and wise that groups of people in our large cities should establish “public-houses” where alcohol is sold along with all other foods and drinks that the public need. Such resorts would compete with the saloons, and would do much to cheer the sadly monotonous lives of a large part of our city population. They would have some share in hastening a better time, when an intelligent judgment of the whole of this immensely difficult question will be possible to us ; and when the dangers and evils of the drink traffic shall be reduced to a minimum, either by placing the whole trade under honest and independent government supervision, or in the hands of trusted citizens pledged by the terms of their license to make no personal profit.

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